**Mitch Ginsburg:** So, as a believer, as a devout Muslim, how do you deal with what happened on October 7th? How do you see it?

**Faiz Abu Sabehan:** [Hebrew]. Look, the way I see it, what happened is something that goes against our religion. It's infuriating. We all obviously condemn the acts of Hammas, which are horrible criminal acts: when you see people slaughtering other people it's something that is simply unacceptable: both according to our religion and according to common sense.

But that's also my feeling when I see planes bombing innocent people; that's also a crime in itself, which is why we Bedouins call on both sides: the Palestinian factions and the State of Israel, which is a sovereign state, to stop and to start returning the hostages. It's painful. People can't sleep at night when their loved ones are held across the border. We can't just sit around at home.

**Mishy Harman (narration):**Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, during these incredibly difficult days, we're trying to bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. These aren't stories, they're just quick conversations, or postcards really, that tried to capture slivers of life right now.

Over the last five weeks we’ve spoken to many families of hostages. That’s how we met Faiz Abu Sabehan, whose 53-year-old brother-in-law, Farhan al-Qadi, a father of eleven, has been kidnapped into Gaza. Faiz is a Bedouin politician, and has twice served as mayor of Rahat: the largest Arab city in Israel. He’s also an educator—a teacher, a principal and an administrator. Much like his political patron, Mansour Abbas, Faiz holds a complex position: he’s in favor of fully integrating into Israeli society on the one hand, but remains steadfast and uncompromising when it comes to central tenets of Islam on the other.

Being the mayor of Rahat is one of the most difficult jobs in the country: the city is poor, under-policed and sees more than its fair share of violence. In fact, Faiz himself has survived multiple assassination attempts. Some of what he says is challenging and might make certain listeners feel uncomfortable. But nevertheless we felt that it’s important to bring his voice too: as an Israeli; as a Bedouin leader; and as a family member of a hostage. Our producers Mitch Ginsburg and Yael Ben Horin went down south to meet Faiz. Leon Feldman is our dubber.

**Faiz Abu Sabehan:** I am Faiz Abu Sabehanand today I'm the co-director of an organization called Desert Stars, which is a leadership school for Bedouins here in the south. There are about 320,000 Bedouins here in the Negev. Some of them live in permanent settlements and towns and some live in unrecognized villages. If you drive to Eilat, you can see all their tents and shacks on either side of the road. And you'll see that there's no infrastructure there at all: nothing. They're all in the lowest socio-economic brackets of course. And that's true of all the Bedouin settlements, including Rahat, which is the largest Arab city here.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** Can you describe a bit of what day to day life in a place like Rahat, and also in the unrecognized villages looks like now—a time when there are rockets falling everywhere. I mean, I imagine most of the residents don't have any protection or shelters.

**Faiz Abu Sabehan:** I'll tell you that in Rahat, which I know well, because I was the mayor until recently, almost half of the houses are unprotected. And the population density here in Rahat is very high. People live on top of each other. So if a rocket lands here, it will be a catastrophe. The State needs to fortify the Bedouin towns and villages exactly in the same way that it fortifies Jewish homes; it needs to care for Bedouin homes, because we're also citizens of the State of Israel.

Just to speak plainly here for a second…the State of Israel has not done that. Nor has it managed to solve and legalize the housing situation in Rahat and elsewhere where many, many people live in shacks. I mean, how is it possible that people live in unrecognized villages within a recognized country?

The State needs to recognize these villages and give them infrastructure: electricity, internet. I mean, when schools close down and classes go on Zoom, our kids just don't learn. In the unrecognized villages kids just stay at home. And a child who sits at home and does nothing, in the end, he loses out, and ultimately he becomes a burden on the state. And now the situation is even more dire, because many of the Bedouins work in the kibbutzim around Gaza, all the places that were attacked, and now there's obviously no work. People are unemployed, and the State simply doesn't have the ability to support them.

The IDF Homefront Command brings over cartons of food, but I mean, how long can that go on? Politically speaking, I belong to the southern branch of the Islamic movement, the Ra’am Party, and we believe that we have to live in this country alongside the Jews that we have to be partners to any decision that concerns the Bedouins, and that that will bring peace to the State of Israel. We understand that if we are weak, the State will be weak too.

The 7th of October caught us all by surprise. We were sitting around—it was a Saturday. And I will say that it was a horrible, really horrible Shabbat for us as Bedouins and Arabs. Nineteen Bedouins were killed both by rockets and by gunmen. In Kibbutz Be’eri and in Re’im, Bedouins were killed by Hamas. What can I tell you…the rocket that comes flying out of Gaza is blind. It doesn't discern between a Jew and an Arab. The fact is, it hit our people. And to my great sorrow, I can say the same thing about the men who came out of Gaza. They aren't true Muslims. They didn't even discern between Muslims and Jews. They shot a woman wearing a Muslim veil—a Bedouin woman. And in another case, a Bedouin guy said: “I’m a Bedouin, I'm an Arab just like you,” but they didn't care and shot him.

Seven Bedouins were kidnapped to Gaza. One of them is my brother-in-law who was taken captive. For 10 days we had no information about him at all. His name is Farhan al-Qadi and he worked as a security guard near Kibbutz Re’im. They took him from his guard post, loaded him up on a vehicle and took him to Gaza. Is he alive? Is he dead? We don't know.

This whole thing puts us in a very difficult and complex predicament. We're between “a rock and a hard place.” Why? because large parts of our extended family live across the border. See, I come from the Tirabin tribe, and 70% of our tribe live in Gaza—all the way from the north of the strip down to Rafiah in the south.

Some of them were killed in the Israeli bombings even though they have no affiliation with Hamas. They're just innocent people sitting in their homes, and then a missile comes and destroys them. It hurts us, of course, just as it hurts every Jew who is harmed.

A child in Gaza is equal to a Jewish child here. It sounds cliche, but we're all human beings. We all have the same blood. And all this needs to come to an end. And it's difficult for us especially because we feel we’re targets on both sides: we’re hurt both here, as Israelis, and there as Gazans. We're suffering here. The entire State is suffering, of course. And over there, the civilians are suffering. It's just not okay that we see a million people moving from the north of the strip to the south. There are no hospitals, there's no nothing—not even water over there. The humanitarian situation needs to be resolved immediately.

Israel needs to recognize that there's a Palestinian state alongside it, and to give the Palestinian people the right to live with dignity. No one is going to wipe out the Jews, and no one is going to wipe out the Palestinians. No one is going anywhere. But to endlessly bomb and bomb…they’ll bomb and then we’ll bomb…and then what? The victims are innocent civilians like me and you. The Palestinian problem needs to be solved from the root, not with a bandaid or a Tylenol. We're sick of BandAids.

What's needed now is a real *cheshbon nefesh*, (a search of our soul). Instead of being two peoples constantly brawling with one another, we need to be one. At the end of the day, we're all human beings. I believe that if the folks there in Gaza get food and provisions, they won't cause trouble. And at the same time, I gotta say the fact that some Jews cause provocations at the Al Aqsa Mosque outrages everyone, including us as Muslims here. We don't want that. There's even a sign right next to the Al Aqsa Mosque, a sign written by the rabbinate no less, which says it is forbidden for Jews to ascend to the Temple Mount. I read that (I wasn't told about it). I read it with my own eyes.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** But do you accept that the Temple Mount is important to Jews too?

**Faiz Abu Sabehan:** No, the Temple Mount is for Muslims. We call it the Al Aqsa Mosque. The Jews have synagogues of their own, let them pray there. This needs to be stopped. It causes outrage all over the Muslim world. Look, we don’t want to be a bonfire that goes up in flames while the entire world is watching. We want to be a pearl of peace and fraternity and cooperation.

**Mitch Ginsburg:** In terms of the negotiations between the State of Israel and the Palestinian factions in Gaza, do you think it would be a good idea to have a Bedouin conduct those negotiations?

**Faiz Abu Sabehan:** That's a question that you have to ask the State. Would Israel trust an Arab to conduct these negotiations? I don’t know. But let’s remember that we are human beings first and foremost. Let's look at ourselves as human beings, and not you being a Jew and me being an Arab. We have to live together, there is no other choice. We have no other land—not you, and not me.